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AUTHOR Miller, H. R.; Shields, E. E.
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ABSTRACT

An intensive week-long pre-practicum training program was developed, conducted, and evaluated. The objectives of the study were to investigate the feasibility of reducing the initial non-functioning period in a counselor training program and to explore the effects on the cognitive and behavioral functioning of beginning counselors. Eight beginning graduate students were trained for five days using microcounseling, interpersonal process recall, a communication model, and modeling of counseling interviews. Prior to and immediately after training, interview behavior and knowledge of empathic responses were assessed using a standard videotape-simulation counselee and an objective, multiple-choice test. The simulated client was used for stimulus control and the elimination of client risk. Results show the interview behavior of the trainees improved significantly; however, no improvement was found in ability to select the most empathic response. Implications for training programs and limitations of the study were discussed. (Author)

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AN EVALUATION OF AN INTENSIVE

PRE-PRACTICUM TRAINING PROGRAM

by

H. R. Miller, Ph.D.
Southern Illinois University
Carbondale, Illinois

E. E. Shields
Mental Health Center
Stroudsberg, Pa.

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AN EVALUATION OF AN INTENSIVE PRE-PRACTICUM TRAINING PROGRAM

Abstract

An intensive week-long pre-practicum training program was developed, conducted, and evaluated. The objectives of the study were to investigate the feasibility of reducing the initial non-functioning period in a counselor training program and to explore the effects on the cognitive and behavioral functioning of beginning counselors. Eight beginning graduate students were trained for five days using microcounseling, interpersonal process recall, a communication model, and modeling of counseling interviews. Prior to and immediately after training, interview behavior and knowledge of empathic responses were assessed using a standard videotape-simulated counselee and an objective, multiple-choice test. The simulated client was used for stimulus control and the elimination of client risk. Results show the interview behavior of the trainees improved significantly; however, no improvement was found in ability to select the most empathic response. Implications for training programs and limitations of the study were discussed.

AN EVALUATION OF AN INTENSIVE PRE-PRACTICUM TRAINING PROGRAM

In traditional counselor training programs, beginning trainees are delayed until late in their program from having contact with clients. Only after a series of preparatory courses is the trainee afforded the luxury of having client contact during practicum. In an effort to investigate the feasibility of reducing the initial non-functioning period in a counselor's training program an intensive week-long marathon pre-practicum training program was developed, conducted, and evaluated. The rationale for attempting to abbreviate training was stimulated in part by the work of Truax and Carkhuff (1967) who demonstrated that initial training times can be greatly decreased yet produce effective counselors. Further, Ivey (1971) pointed out that his micro-counseling model facilitated counseling skills development through skill isolation and immediate feedback. In addition, Kagan and Krathwohl (1967) developed interpersonal process recall, a powerful tool for providing trainees with feedback on their functioning during a counseling session. Finally, Rosenberg's (1969) communication model, which teaches counselors to use a non-defensive style of communication, appears to be a useful counseling skill. While numerous studies have demonstrated that empathy training improves the accuracy of a counselor's empathy responses (Truax and Carkhuff, 1967), and that microcounseling training improves basic interviewing skills (Moreland, Phillips, Ivey, Lockhart, 1970), the feasibility of rapid counseling skill development had not been demonstrated. Thus, this study was designed to explore the effect of a brief, intensive training program combining these training innovations to improve the cognitive and behavioral functioning of beginning counselors. The specific questions posed were: 1) Does the intensive week-long training program improve basic counseling skills? 2) Does the intensive training program improve understanding of facilitative and non-facilitative counselor responses? In other words, can we quickly train beginning counselors to know what to do and then to do it?

SUBJECTS

The subjects included five male and three female beginning graduate students at Bradley University. Approximately half of the students were majoring in counseling and guidance and half in clinical psychology. All of the students were beginning their Master's program and had no prior counseling experience.

PROCEDURE

The training program was conducted during five regular working days, totaling 40 hours, one week prior to the beginning of fall semester classes. On the first day, a pre-test was administered to all Ss in order to assess their basic counseling skill and knowledge of types of counselor responses. Knowledge of types of counselor responses was assessed using a 12 item objective, multiple choice, test adapted from Porter (1950). The test consisted of short narratives of a client's problem followed by five counselor responses, evaluative, interpretive, probing, supportive, and empathic. Trainees were asked to choose the most helpful, which was usually the empathic response. Then trainees were videotaped as they responded to a standard videotape simulated counselee. The simulated counselee was film of a paid actor who role played a client during an initial visit. Short segments of this interview were edited to make the standard simulated client film. The videotape simulated counselee would make a response, then pause to allow enough time for the trainee to respond. The trainee responses were videorecorded. Each trainee made five responses to the simulated client.

After pre-testing, the first training phase focused on Ivey's microcounseling model emphasizing the counseling behaviors of attending and reflection of feeling. On the second day, the microcounseling model was continued with the counseling behaviors of establishing goals and summarizing. On the third day, Rosenberg's model of communication was introduced, discussed, practiced, and students were given feedback on their performance. On the fourth day, the trainers demonstrated a counseling interview and Interpersonal

Process Recall (IPR). Using practice videotapes which they had made earlier, the trainees practiced IPR. On the final day trainees completed practicing IPR and received the post-test. The pre- and post-tests were similar in that the same videotape simulated client presented equivalent problems. Each trainee was given an opportunity to respond, and five responses were videorecorded.

A five point Likert type scale ranging from "very poor" to "very good" was used by judges to rate nine target behaviors: (1) counselor relaxation, (2) accurate perception of client's thought, (3) accurate perception of client's feelings, (4) helping client explore alternatives, (5) accepting client values, (6) understanding the problem as the client sees it, (7) helping the client discover the basic problem, (8) appearing interested and eager to get involved, (9) appearing warm and friendly. The judges were two faculty members from Counselor Education who were not involved in the training program. The judges rated independently and received no reliability training; however, the scales were clearly defined and explained. Using the Spearman Brown correlation coefficient, the inter-rater reliability for both judges was .71. This suggests that the rating scale was adequately reliable.

RESULTS

A two-way analysis of variance was used to determine the relationship between treatment and behavio change in trainees. The analysis of variance of the ratings of basic counseling skills shown in Table 1 indicates a significant difference in the pre-post scores ($F = 6.72$, $P < .05$). An examination of the mean scores for each scale and

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Insert Table 1 About Here

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for total score in Table 2 shows a slight but consistent increase in performance on Scales 1 - 9. The overall mean scores increased from 24.87 to 27.18. The analysis of

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Insert Table 2 About Here

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variance for objective measures of trainee empathic response as shown in Table 3 indicates no significant change.

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DISCUSSION

As predicted, the basic counseling skills of the trainees improved significantly following the brief, intensive training program; however, no improvements were found in the trainees ability to select the most empathic response on an objective test. Apparently we trained people to do it without knowing what they were doing.

Unique to the present study was the limitation of training program time to 40 hours. The improvement in skill following this program is interesting, since it points the way toward earlier client contact and increased efficiency of a training program. Training programs like this are becoming common in the training of paraprofessionals yet no reports of outcome have been published. Questions could be raised about the overall amount of behavior change that resulted, and indeed it was minimal though significant. Not all Ss improved on all scales, but no treatment by subject interaction effect was found. Regardless, the study does demonstrate that overall counseling skill improved.

Perhaps as important as the outcome of the study is the demonstration that such assessment is possible in an applied setting. Most training programs, pariticularly those run by applied counseling centers, fail to evaluate the outcome of their training efforts and instead certify competence merely on the basis of program completion. The fact that some of our Ss improved only slightly indicates that certification of competence on the basis of program completion rather than behavioral competence is poor practice.

Equally interesting is the procedure for assessing behavior change in interviewing skill. The use of a standard simulated counselee and videotape recording trainee responses

not only permitted subsequent evaluation of trainee performance, but did so with no risk to live clients. Findings by Truax and Carkhuff (1967) that counseling may have negative effects should reinforce the caution in using untrained counselors with live clients. Additionally, the standard simulated counselee controlled the client variable across trainees and permitted more accurate isolation of trainee differences.

A major limitation of the study is the absence of a no-treatment control group which prevents assessment of changes which might result from familiarity with the testing situation. Later studies should include such a group. Further research should also use a factorial design so that the separate effects of each training component could be isolated. There is also the need for long-term followup to determine the stability of any behavior change.

Finally, the failure to find improvements in trainee knowledge and empathic counselor responses suggests that more input and emphasis on theory and rationale might be needed. Thus, the benefit from semester-long "practicum" courses might be more in cognitive change than behavior change. Surely trainees need both.

TABLE 1

Analysis Variance for Judges Ratings

of

Basic Counselor Interviewing Behaviors

SOURCE	df	ms	F
Scales	8	1.736	1.11
Treatment	1	55.00	6.72*
Subjects	7	25.13	
Scales x Treatment	8	0.757	
Scales x Subject	56	1.563	
Treatment x Subject	56	8.181	
Scales x Treatment x Subject	56	2.056	

*p $<$ .05

TABLE 2

Mean Scores on the Judges Ratings

for Assessing Basic Counselor Skills

Scale	Mean Score	
	Pretest	Posttest
1- Counselor relaxation	2.63	2.87
2- Accurate perception of client's thoughts	2.93	3.25
3- Accurate perception of client's feelings	2.75	2.93
4- Help client explore alternatives	2.43	2.62
5- Accept client's values	2.68	2.93
6- Understand client's perspective	2.93	3.25
7- Help client discover basic problem	2.25	2.68
8- Counselor appears interested	3.12	3.31
9- Counselor appears warm	3.00	3.25
Total	24.87	27.18

TABLE 3

Analysis of Variance for Objective Measures

of

Counselor Understanding Responses

SOURCE	df	ms	F
Treatment	1	5.063	3.755
Subjects	7	3.848	
Treatment x Subjects	7	1.348	

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